
Title: The Seafarer

Author: trans. Burton Raffel

This tale is true, and
mine. It tells
How the sea took me,
swept me back
And forth in sorrow and
fear and pain,
Showed me suffering in a
hundred ships,
In a thousand ports, and
in me. It tells
Of smashing surf when I
sweated in the cold
Of an anxious watch,
perched in the bow
As it dashed under cliffs.
My feet were cast
In icy bands, bound with
frost,
With frozen chains, and
hardship groaned
Around my heart. Hunger
tore
At my sea-weary soul. No
man sheltered
On the quiet fairness of
earth can feel
How wretched I was,
drifting through winter
On an ice-cold sea,
whirled in sorrow,
Alone in a world blown
clear of love,
Hung with icicles. The
hailstorms flew.
The only sound was the
roaring sea,
The freezing waves. The
song of the swan
Might serve for pleasure,
the cry of the sea-fowl,
The death-noise of birds
instead of laughter,
The mewing of gulls
instead of mead.
Storms beat on the
rocky cliffs and were
echoed
By ice-feathered terns

and the eagles' screams;
No kinsman could offer
comfort there,
To a soul left drowning
in desolation.

And who could believe,
knowing but
The passion of cities,
swelled proud with wine
And no taste of
misfortune, how often,
how wearily,
I put myself back on the
paths of the sea,
Night would blacken; it
would snow from the
north;
Frost bound the earth
and hail would fall,
The coldest seeds. And
how my heart
Would begin to beat,
knowing once more
The salt waves tossing
and the towering sea!
The time for journeys
would come and my soul
Called me eagerly out,
sent me over
The horizon, seeking
foreigners' homes.

But there isn't a man
on earth so proud,
So born in greatness, so
bold with his youth,
Grown so grave, or so
graced by God,
That he feels no fear as
the sails unfurl,
Wondering what Fate has
willed and will do.
No harps ring in his
heart, no rewards,
No passion for women, no
worldly pleasures,
Nothing, only the oceans
heave;
But longing wraps itself
around him.
Orchards blossom, the
towns bloom,
Fields grow lovely as the
world springs fresh,
And all these admonish
that willing mind
Leaping to journeys,
always set

In thoughts traveling on a
quickenning tide.
So summer's sentinel, the
cuckoo, sings
In his murmuring voice,
and our hearts mourn
As he urges. Who could
understand,
In ignorant ease, what we
others suffer
As the path of exile
stretch endlessly on?

And yet my heart
wanders away,
My soul roams with the
sea, the whales'
Home, wandering to the
wildest corners
Of the world, returning
ravenous with desire,
Flying solitary, screaming,
exciting me
To the open ocean,
breaking oaths
On the curve of a wave.

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